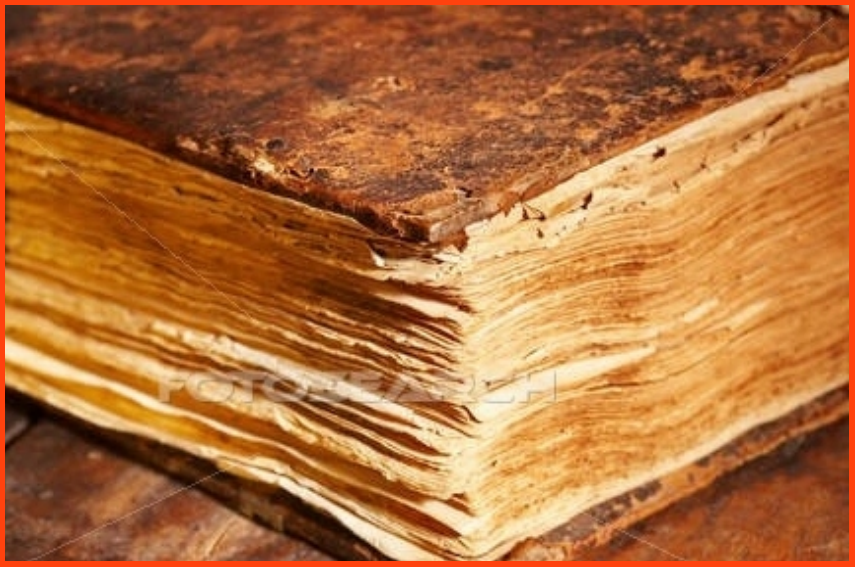


**Walter Rhett**

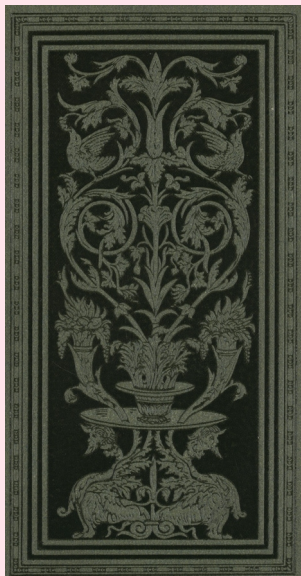


*“A Glory Over  
Everything”*

**History's Invisible Veil**

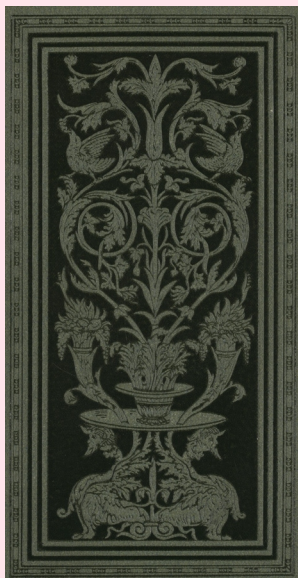
*Conversations about the Faith and Acts  
of Charleston's Families*

A Conversation  
About Faith and Obstacles, Family and Triumph  
For the 147<sup>th</sup> Jubilee of African-Americans.



***“A Glory Over  
Everything”***

**History's  
Invisible Veil**



## **History's Invisible Veil**

***“Beloved, let us love one another,  
because love is of God.”  
“Remember your word to your servant,  
in which you have made me hope.”***

***For Damali Marie Chou***

***and***

***The Women of My Twitter Community***

***And***

***Everybody Gone***

# ***“A Glory Over Everything”***

## **History's Invisible Veil**



**A Southern Perlo  
Griot Source Book  
©2012**





## **Book One**

**“But whenever he entered the Lord’s presence to speak  
with him, he removed the veil until he came out.”**

Exodus 34:34



*Hilton Head, South Carolina Celebration;  
4<sup>th</sup> of July, 1936.*

## ***"A Glory Over Everything"***

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**"Summon your power, O God,  
the power, O God, by which you have worked for us."**

Psalm 68:28

**"Lord, give them better,"** goes the powerful prayer of a South Carolina woman, recorded on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina in 1932 by linguist Lorenzo Turner and found in the Library of Congress archives. Lost in the broad annals of American slavery and its aftermath are the many prayers and individual acts of courage whose invisible silence is used today to shut down the struggle for better. But behind that veil is a surviving mystic, a knowledge of time outside of its silence. A belief achieved by faith that bears fruit in a bramble of thorns. It lies there, behind the invisible divide, resting, waiting in the silence of the old ways. Silent now, it was once the muscle that made the way.

Ann Romney is one absorbed by the deceptions that spring from this silence. She voids its unspoken acts of courage and is blind to its mystic. She can not clearly articulate the difference between wealth and privilege, and poverty and the dependency and submission demanded of the poor. She does not know their prayer. Her failure to know its significance and tension, her incoherence and mangled syntax; her non-existent sense of justice shows her lack of experience with and isolation from mainstream lives and history. Like Zora Neale Hurston said, "None of them knew."

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That absence of reference belies her struggle. She knows facts, but not unspoken truth, not inner reflection. She is unable to establish an ethic of knowledge about the obstacles and soaring possibilities of women's lives. One commenter thoughtfully explained:

*Ann Romney's choice to stay at home is not the same kind of choice that women of ordinary means have to make. For them, the choice is often a balancing act between being involved in their children's lives or going out and earning enough money to survive. Hilary Rosen meant that Ann Romney didn't have to face that kind of choice. Ann Romney will never have to worry about paying for medical care, food, clothing, and tuition. She'll never have to explain to her kids why they can't have the things that other kids have. When Ann Romney says that raising five boys was work, many mothers will say, yes it is. Try doing it on a part-time salary at Wal-Mart with no health benefit.*

*It's a disgrace that the media failed to find the real story in Rosen's comment, the one in which people of extraordinary wealth are unlikely to fully understand the plight of the poor and the middle class. The wealthy confuse being poor with being broke, considering it a temporary situation that will be resolved when the trust fund kicks in.*

Women are a majority but still a marginalized population. They are under attack. Without a recognition of the dangers and distress women face, untempered cheerfulness, though well mannered, sounds like ingratitude.

Trying to be authentic, Ann Romney authors confusion. She misses the hazards and anchors women use to hold their place when she

## *"A Glory Over Everything"*

says, "I love it when women have to work." Rather than understanding women, she is looking at her own safe place.

That old South Carolina woman knew there was little to love about being poor or field work, yet she offered a prayer bright with hope. She doesn't want to fit in, doesn't have to pretend to anyone what living has taught her and her three word prayer rises far beyond petition. It is a beatific prayer. In her full submission, she is directing God, commanding his will for her highest purpose. It is her commandment to him, and she fully expects him to follow. Her prayer is rooted in the calling of their same shared love; lay the burdens down: give them better.

Ann Romney fumbles. But the elder prays and addresses the wrongs she witnessed and knows, the needs she sees and feels, the status and opportunities of the children that shall come after her and the world they will make and find. She knows it's not the work or tasks that women do that speaks for them, but the silent



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innate ability to transform, to change the world one breath at a time even when you can't catch your breath, or can't breathe from worry or all the faces or the crushing load; the long journey or the tight turns and demands waiting on you ahead.

On this ability to transform Toni Morrison has Sula take flight at the end of her novel, why she says the secret is to ride the air; it's embedded in the myth, “The People Who Could Fly,” repeated during slavery, told again and again in the quarters. People knew people who had seen folk lay down hoes and baskets of sheaves and lift themselves straight into the air. It's the source of the welcome meeting with the band of angels, the sly knowledge of the chariot's power over the carriage of privilege. The elder knows storms have defining fury. She knows battered shores. She is a vested rebel; she shook the bedrock each day she walked and lay anchor in prayer. She expects God to deliver on his promise.

Would Ann Romney of cheerful manners speak these simple, clear words to her husband, her life partner who seeks our nation's highest position of service? Is there a higher, more succinct calling than these three words the old woman places before God? Is there any doubt about what she means?

Powerful clarity takes courage. Courage rises with the same ease as prayer when it is elevates not desire but love. In the dark era of slavery, couples whose love was a light of courage influenced the nation's course and gave us better. The women in these families

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faced more than ridicule or mockery. Daily they walked in circumstances a step away from death. They raised children whose education was illegal and whose bodies were sold. They loved their god but mostly hated their choices, but found the courage to act. Their voices and prayers rest in, but also anchor, our history. A poet said "what leaves their lips has its source in their hearts."

Catherine Springs, a free woman of color and financial means, the leading merchant of women's fashion in my southern hometown (Summerville, SC) before and after the Civil War, she left a legacy of love and courage. A large property owner, Miss Kitty donated land and helped fund a hospital, school, and church for the community.

She spread confidence through the leading edge of fashion. Her home trunk shows, staged from her "single buggy piled with boxes for the ladies to make their selections," delighted the children, adults, and neighbors who mingled as Ms. Kitty revealed the season's latest from the buyers in New York. She knew the joys and budgets of her women and they trusted her guiding hand.

Miss Kitty knew how to hail the attention of a town; her visits were events of dazzling excitement and memories. But she also knew how to get God to take notice. For the way you live, the way you connect what you know through your steps and words is the way you get God's ear and live in the giant steps of life's footprint. Even as a merchant, Miss Kitty knew better meant not living for worldly goods and prizes, but in accord with the question asked and



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answered by her favorite Bible verse: "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."



Like Katherine Springs, Nancy Weston's prayers and verses for the nation and her children are unknown, her words in time's invisible veil. She, as Ms. Kitty, was a Charleston seamstress. Although enslaved, she worked to support herself and lived in a small house on St. Philip Street. The two women, Kitty Springs and Nancy Weston, shared an era, the crossing divide between slavery and freedom; they operated businesses in the same town. Both came from prominent families. Both knew the companionship and devotion of men of a different race.

Ms. Kitty was a member of the freed Dibble family from Camden, SC. Decades later, a Dibble family member would take in a young 14 year old girl who kept house for the chance to go to Mather Academy, the missionary supported boarding school across the street in Camden from the Dibble home. That young student was the mother of James Clyburn, the first elected African-American member of the US House of Representatives from South Carolina since Reconstruction and House Whip, its third ranking member, under Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

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Nancy Weston

Nancy Weston was member of a noted family of craft and trades workers tied to Georgetown planter Plowden Weston. Hers was a large extended family of blended European, African, and Native American descent who were slave and free. In the mid-1840s, a prominent young Charleston lawyer began a relationship with Nancy Weston after the death of his wife. His father was the Chief Justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court, a slaveholder with 14 children. Two of his two sisters became famous abolitionists, Sarah

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and Angelina Grimké. The fifth and youngest son, Henry Grimké, was the widowed lawyer smitten with Nancy Weston, a slave.

As had his sisters before, he and Nancy soon left the city, but love drove him more than the politics of freedom. He resigned his law practice and moved her with him to a family rice plantation, Cane Acres, near Walterboro in the country. He built Nancy a small house and fathered her three sons. Small intimate details of their relationship survive in his letters to his older adult children in Charleston, whose mother Nancy had nursed through illness.



### **Footprints: Words That Mark Our Way**

The difficulties of insight that plagued Ann Romney were also a part of the historic abolitionist and women's suffrage movements. In an July 23, 1837 letter excerpt (following) to Catherine Beecher, (the activist sister of writer Harriet Beecher Stowe), Angelina Grimké looks at the deeper meaning and public impact implied by the types of views held by Romney and others. Views that demand terms of “convenience” for those who hold them.

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DEAR FRIEND: Thou sayest, 'the *best* way to make a person like a thing which is disagreeable, is to try in some way to make it agreeable.' So, then, instead of convincing a person by sound argument and pointed rebuke that sin is *sin*, we are to *disguise* the opposite virtue in such a way as to make him like that, in preference to the sin he had so dearly loved. We are to *cheat* a sinner out of his sin, rather than to compel him, under the stings of conviction, to give it up from deep-rooted principle. . .

Thou sayest, 'if a certain class of persons is the subject of unreasonable prejudice, the peaceful and Christian way of removing it would be to endeavor to render the unfortunate persons who compose this class, so useful, so *humble*, so *unassuming*, &c. that prejudice would be supplanted by complacency in their goodness, and *pity* and sympathy for their disabilities.' 'If the friends of the blacks had quietly set themselves to work to increase their intelligence, their usefulness, &c., and then had appealed to the pity and benevolence of their fellow citizens, a very different result would have appeared.'

[cont'd next page]

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Or in other words, if one person is guilty of a sin against another person, I am to let the sinner go entirely unrepented, but to persuade the injured party to bear with humility and patience all the outrages that are inflicted upon him, and thus try to soothe the sinner 'into complacency with their goodness' in 'bearing all things, and enduring all things.' Well, suppose I succeed:—is that sinner won from the evil of his ways by *principle*? No!

Has he the principle of love implanted in his breast? No! Instead of being in love with the virtue exhibited by the individual, because it is virtue, he is delighted with the personal convenience he experiences from the exercise of that virtue. He feels kindly toward the individual, because he is an instrument of his enjoyment, a mere means to promote his wishes. There is no reformation there at all.

I suppose the friends of the colored man were just as guilty as was the great Apostle, who, by the angry, and excited, and *prejudiced* Jews, was accused of being 'a pestilent fellow and a mover of sedition,' because he declared himself called to preach the everlasting gospel to the Gentiles, whom they considered as 'dogs,' and utterly unworthy of being placed on the same platform of human rights and a glorious immortality.

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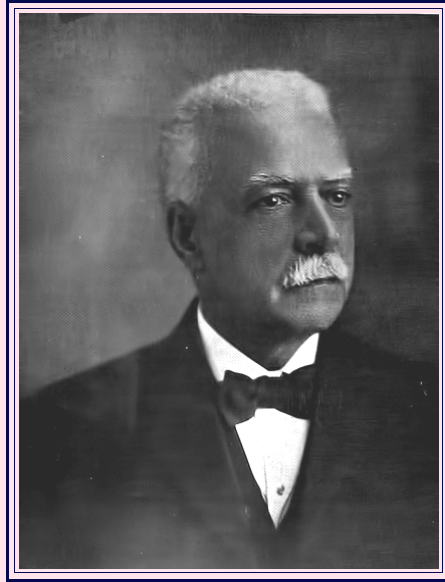
At Cane Acres, Nancy carried authority. She overruled the plantation's overseer, forbidding him to work the enslaved in the fields on Sunday and bring embarrassment to the family for violating the Sabbath; Henry backed her decision. She attacked Henry once in a domestic dispute and knocked him down. Mainly she tended her chickens and flowers. Her oldest child, Archibald, was given Henry as his middle name. But fate offered its twist; Henry the father died suddenly when the boys were young.

Unlike women freed by "dead hands," (manumitted by a will) after Henry's death, Nancy's status remained unchanged. Nancy was given a small pension and returned to Charleston. She educated the boys, often making them recite aloud long passages as she listened. Just before the Civil War began, one of the older siblings claimed the brothers as his property, ignoring Nancy's assertion not to, as they were his brothers. Her sons were beaten, ran away, and one was purchased by a naval officer stationed in Charleston as a body servant. (One, the youngest, has been lost to time.)

After the war, two brothers reunited and enrolled in Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. Notice in a Boston paper of a Grimké winning an oratorical contest caught the eye of one of their aunts. On the strength of the last name, she wrote to him, offering her praise, asking if he were one of the children of their family's servants. He wrote back informing her, he and his brother were her nephews. "Restore the Grimké name to its greatness," she urged.

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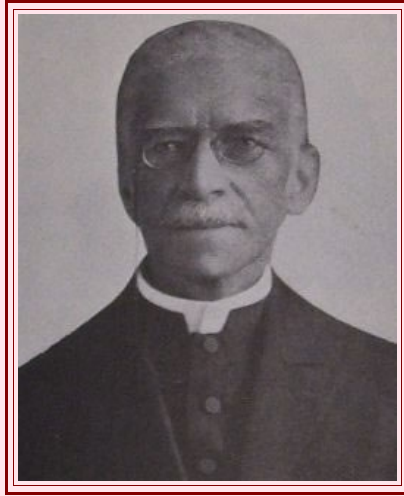
Archibald Henry Grimké

Archibald Henry Grimké went to Harvard Law (its second black graduate in 1874) long before Mitt Romney showed up, knowing nothing of the love and courage that trumped privilege and wealth to bring about this historic step. Archibald edited a newspaper and wrote several biographies. Archibald was a founder of the NAACP, served as president of the Washington, DC chapter, won the organization's prestigious Spingarn award. He vigorously opposed Woodrow Wilson's policy of racial segregation in the federal government and fought to maintain voting rights. He served as a US consul to the Dominican Republic.



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Francis Grimké

His brother, Francis James Grimké went on to Princeton Seminary and then ministered the 15<sup>th</sup> Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC for 60 years. He was a trustee of Howard University and an outspoken voice for justice, addressing Presidents in his sermons. Washington, DC named a public school for him. His wife, Charlotte Forten, taught school in Port Royal, (Hilton Head) SC during the civil war. Her grandfather was a wealthy sail maker from Philadelphia. Her grandfather, James Forten, had served as a power boy in the Revolutionary War on board a patriot privateer, The Royal Louis.

James Forten's life is another miracle of the troubled waters. At age nine, he went to work as a chimney sweep—his mother insisted he

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Charlotte Forten

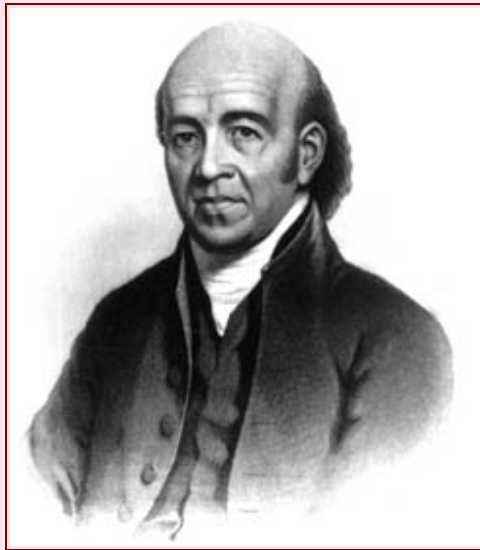
stay in school for at two more years when he wanted to go to work to help the family at seven. After the Revolutionary War, he returned to his apprentice as a sail maker, becoming the shop's foreman. Forten bought the business when his employer retired. His innovative sail designs were enormous successes and in demand; he used his wealth for his family—and in the cause of human rights under the banner of American liberty.

In Philadelphia, James Forten knew well Morris Brown and other Charleston expatriates and worked closely with them to end slavery. Morris Brown, a tall, handsome unlettered cobbler (the Atlanta college is named for him) was an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) preacher and later bishop who after leaving Charleston organized AME churches in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois,

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Wisconsin, and Canada. He was Paul to AME's founder Richard Allen's Peter. Before leaving Charleston, Brown organized the South's oldest AME congregation when he lead a protest of 4,630 blacks away from Methodist services on a single Sunday in 1818. Maintaining good relations with civil and church authorities after the breach, Brown soon had 5,000 urban enslaved regularly attending night services at a Nassau Street meeting house for his Bethel congregation, sometimes until after midnight.



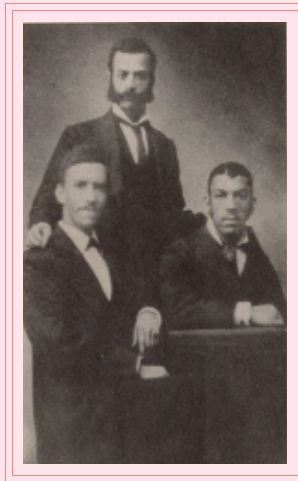
Morris Brown

Warned by the mayor, Morris Brown fled Charleston secretly in 1822, in the wake of the largest planned armed revolt against slavery in America's history. The uprising, stopped days before its plan unfurled, was organized by Denmark Vesey, a former

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Methodist lay leader, but a Presbyterian in good standing until the day he was hanged. Vesey, Ned and Rolla Bennett, Peter Poyas, Gullah Jack Pritchard, and 30 others were tried, hanged and buried in unmarked graves.



Francis, Archibald, and John Grimké

Archibald Grimké wrote a small book about Denmark Vesey, in which he said of Vesey: "All things considered, he was truly an extraordinary man. It is impossible to say where he was born, or who were his parents. He was, alas! as far as my knowledge of his personal history goes, a man without a past." Denmark Vesey arrived at Santo Domingo by way of Africa, as one of cargo of 390 Africans destined for slavery. Grimké writes, "Of the 389 others, we know absolutely nothing. Not an incident, nor a token, not even a name has floated to us across the intervening years, from all that

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multitudinous misery, from such an unspeakable tragedy, except that the ship reached its destination, and the slaves were sold. Like boats that pass at sea, that slave vessel loomed for a lurid instant on the horizon, and was gone for ever—all but Denmark Vesey.” “On that voyage Captain Vesey was strongly attracted by the “beauty, intelligence, and alertness” of one of the slaves on board.”

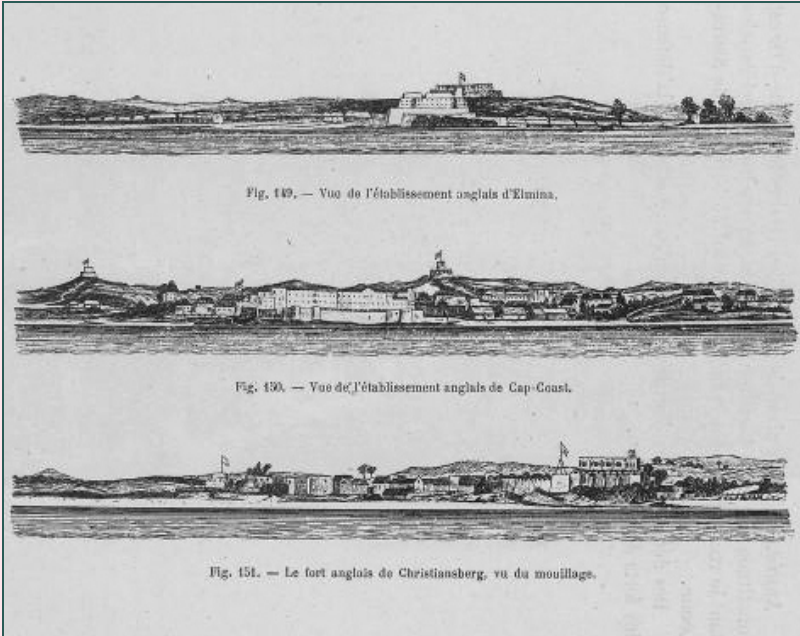
A sailor and carpenter, Vesey spoke nine languages.

He purchased his freedom with the winnings from a Charleston lottery. His favorite Bible verse, Joshua 4: 21, was a station of his faith, and for him, the way forward: *And he spoke unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones?* In this verse, about the twelve stones God commands to be placed in the river's waters to mark and remember safe passage, Joshua asks their meaning. In these stones, Denmark Vesey saw sign and glory: God's benefits condemn the wicked; his blessings call to heart his mercies, and secretly revive all who remember them and who are thankful even for the generations to come. Freedom is a stone of thanksgiving.

His plan for the liberation of Charleston's slaves involved organizing the enslaved by ethnic group, led by their own traditional leaders. His plan unraveled at the last minute as men, questioned and threatened, confessed, and pointed to Vesey's leadership. He was arrested, tried, and hanged July 2, 1822.

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Slave Forts on the West African Coast

### Footprints: Words That Mark Our Way

**"Negro Plot.** The Official Account of the Late Intended Resurrection Among A Portion of the Blacks of the City of Charleston," published in Boston in 1822, represents the official version of Vesey's plan for liberation. Excerpts of the account, witness testimony, and sentencings are presented here.

An excerpt from an Archibald Grimké 1920 speech, "The Shame of America," delivered around the country at age 71, follows.

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### **From the Account:**

At 8 o'clock on this evening, the intendant received a visit from a gentleman who is advantageously known in this community for his worth and respectability.

This gentleman, with an anxiety, which the occasion was well calculated to beget, stated to the intendant, that, having the most unbounded confidence in a faithful slave belonging to his family, who was distinguished alike for his uncommon intelligence and integrity, he was induced to inform him, that rumours were abroad of an intended insurrection of the blacks, and that it was said, that this movement had been traced to some of the coloured members of Dr. Palmer's church, in which he was known to be a class leader. On being strongly enjoined to conceal nothing, he, the next day, Friday the 14th, came to his master, and informed him, that the fact was really so, that a publick disturbance was contemplated by the blacks, and not a moment should be lost in informing the constituted authorities, as the succeeding Sunday, the 16th, at 12 o'clock, at night, was the period fixed for the rising, which, if not prevented, would inevitably occur at that hour.

This slave, it appears, was in no degree connected with the plot, but he had an intimate friend, A-- (one of his class) who had been trusted by the conspirators with the secret, and had been solicited by them to join their association; to this A-- first appeared to consent, but, on no period, absolutely sent in his adhesion. According to the statement which he afterwards



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made himself to the court, it would seem that it was a subject of great regret and contrition with him, that he had ever appeared to lend his approbation to a scheme so wicked and atrocious, and that he sought occasion to make atonement, by divulging the plot, which on the 14th he did, to the slave of the gentleman in question, his class leader.

This gentleman, therefore, mentioned, that his servant had informed him, that A-- had stated, that about three months ago, Rolla, belonging to governour Bennett, had communicated to him the intelligence of the intended insurrection, and had asked him to join--"That he remarked, in the event of their rising, they would not be without help, as the people from San Domingo and Africa would assist them in obtaining their liberty, if they only made the motion first themselves. That if A-- wished to know more, he had better attend their meetings, where all would be disclosed."

After this, at another interview, Rolla informed A--, that "the plan was matured, and that on Sunday night, the 16th June, a force would cross from James's Island and land on South Bay, march up and seize the arsenal and guardhouse, that another

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body at the same time would seize the arsenal on the neck, and a third would rendezvous in the vicinity of his master's mills. They would then sweep the town with fire and sword, not permitting a single white soul to escape."

As this account was remarkably coincident with the one given by William, (Mr. Paul's slave,) as the witnesses could have had no possible communication, or the story have been the result of preconcert and combination, the sum of this intelligence was laid before the governour by 9 o'clock, and by 10 o'clock the commanding officers of the regiments of the city militia convened by his excellency's order, at the residence of the intendant.

### **Witness Statement:**

Vesey told the meeting the people was to rise up and fight the white people for their liberty; . . . I belong to the African congregation; on Saturday the 15th June, a man was to be sent into the country to bring down the people, and Rolla was to command the country people from Ashley river at the bridge; Ned Bennett and John Horry to meet at Mr. Horry's corner, and Batteau to come down with Vesey's party.

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### **Judge's Sentencing Statement for Gullah Jack**

JACK PRITCHARD--*[commonly called Gullah Jack; he was from Angola and was considered a meta-physician, a practitioner of spiritual arts, conjuring or root. He had said those who ate parched corn and placed a crab claw in their mouth would be invincible except from treason--which was the cause for the plot's collapse. /wr]*

The Court after deliberately considering all the circumstances of your case, are perfectly satisfied of your guilt. In the prosecution of your wicked designs, you were not satisfied with resorting to natural and ordinary means, but endeavoured to enlist on your behalf, all the powers of darkness, and employed for the purpose, the most disgusting mummary and superstition. You represented yourself as invulnerable; that you could neither be taken nor destroyed, and that all who fought under your banners would be invincible.

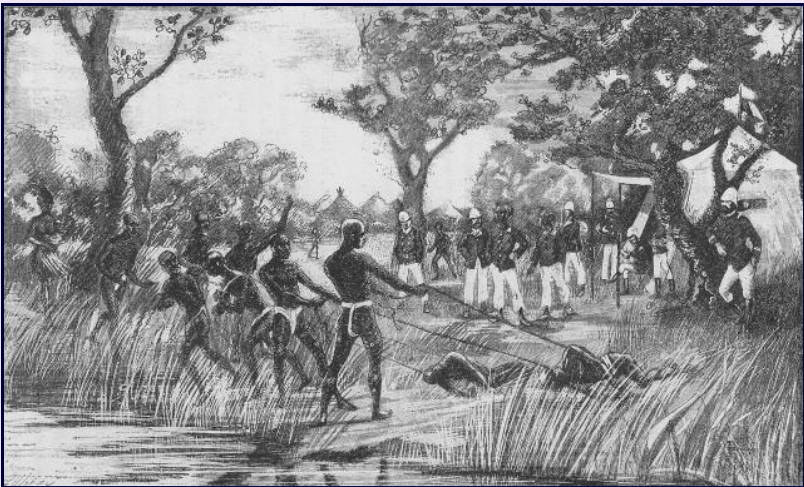
While such wretched expedients are calculated to *inspire* the confidence, or to alarm the fears of the ignorant and credulous, they excite no other emotion in the mind of the intelligent and enlightened, but contempt and disgust. Your boasted charms have not preserved yourself, and of course could not protect others. "Your altars and your gods have sunk together in the dust." The airy spectres, conjured by you, have been chased away by the special light of truth, and you stand

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exposed, the miserable and deluded victim of offended justice. Your days are literally numbered. You will shortly be consigned to the cold and silent grave, and all the powers of darkness cannot rescue you from your approaching fate!

Let me then, conjure you to devote the remnant of your miserable existence, in fleeing from the "*wrath to come*." This can only be done by a full disclosure of the truth. The court are willing to afford you all the aid in their power, and to permit any minister of the gospel, whom you may select to have free access to you. To him you may unburden your guilty conscience. Neglect not the opportunity, or there is "no device nor art beyond the tomb," to which you must shortly be consigned.



A French Illustration of a West African Battle, 1890.

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### **Archibald H. Grimké, "The Shame of America," 1920.**

"The author of the Declaration of Independence said once that he trembled for his country when he remembered that God was just. And he did well to do so. But while he was about it he might have quaked a little for himself. For he was certainly guilty of the same crime against humanity, which had aroused in his philosophic and patriotic mind such lively sensations of anxiety and alarm in respect to the Nation.

Said Jefferson on paper: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," while on his plantation he was holding some men as slaves, and continued to hold them as such for fifty years thereafter, and died at the end of a long and brilliant life, a Virginia slaveholder.

And yet Thomas Jefferson was sincere, or fancied that he was, when he uttered those sublime sentiments about the rights of man, and when he declared that he trembled for his country when he remembered that God was just. This inconsistency between the man's magnificence in profession and his smallness in practice, between the grandeur of what he promised and the meanness of what he performed, taken in conjunction with his cool unconsciousness of the discrepancy, is essentially and emphatically an American trait, a national idiosyncrasy. "

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Did Vesey's hanging reveal divine disapproval of his grand plan for resistance? Had his dream failed? Slavery was the law, the historical natural order. Many thousands died before and after the auction block; the ill-gotten price of America's wealth. The bones of the many thousand lay in the waters or ground, lost, like those shipped with Vesey, without review. Vesey's death was an act of sacrifice on their behalf, a remembered thanksgiving. Peter Poyas touched and joined in their unnamed silence when he counseled all those sentenced to hang. Grimké records his words: "Do not open your lips! Die silent as you shall see me do."

Grimké concludes his account of Vesey's plan for liberation with a poem:

*"Right forever on the scaffold,  
Wrong forever on the Throne,  
Yet that scaffold sways the future,  
And, behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow,  
Keeping watch above His own."*



Howard Thurman, the Dean of the Chapel at Boston University, was a mentor to Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., who had Dr. Thurman's book in his briefcase the afternoon he was shot and killed in Memphis. Howard Thurman was raised by his grandmother, a jubilee (former slave) woman who always told

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Howard Thurman he was “a child of God.” Thurman as a Baptist minister and Quaker mystic focused on the choices of the living rather than the questions of salvation as a function of faith judged in an afterlife. Simply put, Thurman knew what we term good and evil will not have the “last word about the meaning of life or the nature of existence.” Thurman knew “God expects us to not only to choose our actions but our reactions.” Both are combined in the elder's prayer.

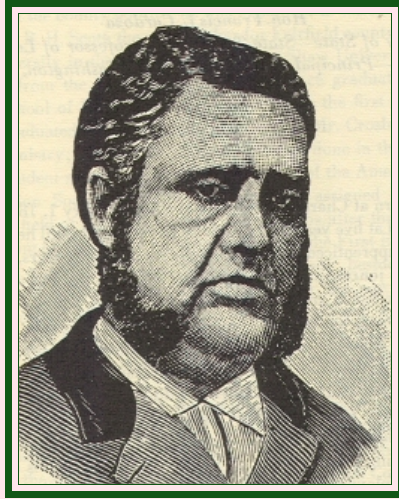
When the stone was turned, the women expressed not dread, but joy. That evidence was all Thurman needed to know. And Ann Romney is covered by the same mystic, despite her struggles in understanding the choices and tensions facing women with different incomes and social standing trying to meet the demands of raising families. The prayer for better includes not only resilience but also the gateway to wisdom.

Despite the potential threat, Charleston authorities would not break up a religious meeting. So when the enslaved entered their own sanctuary, inside they were free of fear, reprisals, or the demands of obedience and the threatened and real punishments of the Sugar House, the wheels and whips that broke their spirit. In worship, the institution of religion extended the hand of freedom; by their prayers, they had shaken the chains off. Not for good, but long enough to know in the depth of their souls the bounty of Zion: “For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.”



## *"A Glory Over Everything"*

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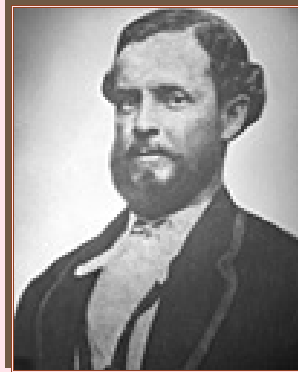
Francis Cardozo

Washington, DC was also home to another son of Charleston, Francis Cordozo, born to an free mother and Jewish father. Francis, educated at Scotland's Glasgow University; a Congregational minister in New Haven, Connecticut, returned to become the founding principal of Charleston's Avery Institute, a private, mission supported training school of high standards for black teachers. Cordozo became the first black to win election to statewide office in the US, elected as South Carolina's Secretary of State in 1868 and its state treasurer in 1872. A Washington, DC high school where he was later principal is named for him. His granddaughter, Eslande Goode, married Paul Robeson. His brother, Thomas Cardozo, was elected Superintendent of Education in Mississippi in 1871 and is credited as the father of free universal

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education (public education) in Mississippi for all students, black and white.



Thomas Cardozo

Lewis and Thomas Cardozo's mother was Lydia Weston--no doubt kin to Nancy, but the relationship lies unverified with no more than the powerful connection of a legacy name tied to a large prosperous clan of business owners, teachers, crafts persons, skilled mechanics that enjoyed unparalleled privilege and shared membership in the circle of Charleston urban blacks, enslaved and free who were trusted and familiar with the lives of privilege and wealth.

The key to love is what it creates. In a letter written to white Methodists protesting the proposed use of a African burial site as a carriage barn, black Methodist members called the dead "the core of their hearts." Lydia and Nancy's sons created the dreams of their mothers. Their mothers courage to stand for a truth not bent by

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fear or political aims, to raise a family, challenged society. They faced the pressures of hate, rigid social barriers, and law, but found fierce courage in love. They forged a vision of a greater love that guided the lives of their boys.

Their extended Weston family included Jacob and John Furman Weston, who married the daughters of black Charleston's finest ante-bellum teacher, Thomas Bonneau (he taught Daniel A. Payne, appointed an AME bishop by Morris Brown, and the first African-American college president at Wilberforce University in Ohio). It extends to legendary teacher Frances Rollin (Charleston's first black teacher hired after the war), teachers William Weston and Mary Weston Fordham (Booker T. Washington wrote the forward to *Magnolia Leaves*, her book of poetry). All taught at Avery.



Avery Institute

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### **Book Two**

**I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands, and they will no longer fall prey to your power.**

Ezekiel 13:21



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Indeed, we live beneath the sky, . . .  
That great smooth Hand of God, stretched out  
On all His children fatherly,  
To bless them from the fear and doubt,  
Which would be, if, from this low place,  
All opened straight up to His face  
Into the grand eternity.

--Elizabeth Barrett Browning



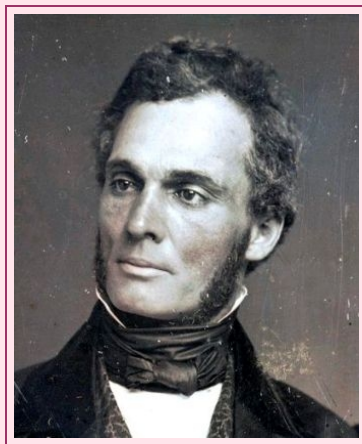
## *"A Glory Over Everything"*

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**Take millstones and grind flour; take off your veil. Lift up your skirts, bare your legs, and wade through the streams.**

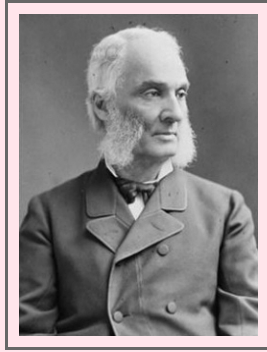
Isaiah 47:2

**Robert Purvis, too, was another Philadelphia resident** born in Charleston. Purvis, known as the "President of the Underground Railroad," helped over 9,000 enslaved gain freedom, his Philadelphia home was a well known "safe house." His mother born in Charleston to a Jewish father and a mother from Morocco married an older Englishman, a wealthy cotton factor who relocated the family to Philadelphia. Upon his death, he left his fortune to his sons, and Purvis who had dropped out of Amherst, used his sizeable inheritance to support his family and abolitionist causes. Purvis' wife, Harriet, was Charlotte Forten's aunt, and Charlotte lived with the Purvis family for a period.



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Robert Purvis (2)

As he hated slavery, Purvis loved democracy, for he saw its unique and true potential: "It is the safeguard of the strongest to live under a government which is obliged to respect the voice of the weakest." He, like the Grimké sisters fought against "the double curse of race and sex," and labored for the right of women to vote.



Three Charleston men, a constitutional delegate, a slave broker, and Purvis, a mixed race abolitionist, tempered the American legacy. Charles Pinckney, the colonial planter and Constitution signer, elevated slavery beyond a southern institution to an American pillar when he helped place the three-fifths

compromise in the Constitution, in order to count the enslaved in the political census for representation. Henry Laurens, the slave broker, by the internal force of his views, expanded the American character in ways still veiled. He acknowledges and heightens the

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### Footprints: Words That Mark Our Path

Charleston's Henry Laurens was America's largest slave broker; his commission from sales made him one of the colonial America's wealthiest men and the most prominent market maker in human beings. His 19 volumes of letters are the best day to day record of the American trade, and includes prices, locations, conditions, and reports of those enslaved.

Henry Laurens was the fourth president of the Continental Congress and peace commissioner for the American revolution (along with Ben Franklin, John Jay, and John Adams). He once received a letter from Angola suggesting a partnership to enslave the English! Imprisoned in England, at the end of the Revolutionary war, he was swapped for Gen. Cornwallis. He was the first European to be cremated in America, by the slaves on his plantation, now in trust to Trappist monks. He owed the desk on which the Declaration of Independence was signed.

Henry in a great (many say impossible) irony, recognizes the enslaved as human beings, with dignity, character, and divinity. He compartmentalizes and petitions his sale of human beings, holding up the English law of property, but he sees well the contradiction:

tension in slavery when he recognized the humanity of the Africans



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"I found the Christian religion and slavery growing under the same authority and cultivation. I nevertheless disliked it. In former days there was no combating the prejudices of men supported by interest; the day I hope is approaching when, from principles of gratitude as well as justice, every man will strive to be foremost in showing his readiness to comply with the golden rule.

I am not one of those "who arrogate the peculiar care of Providence in each fortunate event, nor one of those who dare trust in Providence for defence and security of their own liberty while they enslave and wish to continue in slavery thousands who are as well entitled to freedom as themselves."

he sells and trades, refusing to turn them into caricatures. His is the ultimate contradiction and paradox, but it makes possible the path to freedom by its refusal to deny the veiled humanity of those the law permitted to be sold on the auction block (or at private sale, individually or in lots), chained, and forced to work.

Robert Purvis wrestles with the American legacy of slavery and its contradictions head on. By birth and cause, he breaks the bounds of race. He expands dissent into an organized underground of resistance; he extends the meaning of freedom to those placed beyond its reach. He takes Pinckney's three-fifths and incorporates into its raw numbers Lauren's implied humanity to make explicit to

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the country the flesh and bone of why the enslaved are to be free, now, by any action necessary, law and practice to the contrary. Purvis' view of government overtly, radically extends American liberty.

Purvis, Morris Brown, James Forten, Sarah and Angelina Grimké all knew each other. They were members of William Lloyd Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society; the sisters were members of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society which Purvis co-founded and served as President. They commiserated over the burning of Pennsylvania Hall three days after it was built and opened, this magnificent building, a monument to freedom praised in a letter from John Quincy Adams as a “place wherein liberty and equality of civil rights can be freely discussed, and the evils of slavery fearlessly portrayed.” The abolitionists were blamed for the fire and ensuing riot, accused of inciting violence by “race mixing.” Philadelphia's firemen stood by and watched the new building burn to the ground. The women of these families led lives in the midst of storms and tumult. They were devoted to justice in the simple act of raising children who fulfilled the destiny whispered in a prayer in the 1930s, on Hilton Head--the hallowed ground of America's first emancipation celebration. At midnight, January 1, 1864. Thursday, New Year's Day.

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"EMANCIPATION DAY IN SOUTH CAROLINA"—THE COLOR-BRETHREN OF THE 1ST SOUTH CAROLINA (COLORED) VOLUNTEERS ADDRESSING THE REGIMENT, AFTER HAVING BEEN PRESENTED WITH THE STARS AND STRIPES, AT SMITH'S PLANTATION, FORT MOUTRIE ISLAND, JANUARY 1.—FROM A SKETCH BY OUR SPECIAL ARTIST.—SEE PAGE 275.

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### **Book Four**

**I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands, and they will no longer fall prey to your power.**  
Ezekiel 13:21



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**Francis Grimké's wife, Charlotte Forten**, was there that night. She had written to John Greenleaf Whittier, requesting he write a hymn to be sung for the occasion, performed by her "scholars from St. Helena." In her published journal, Charlotte Forten describes boarding the *Flora* with an crowd of guests and being ferried across the sound from St. Helena Island to attend the celebration at Camp Saxton. She described it as "the most glorious day this nation has ever seen." Reports numbered the crowd at 5,000, [the number fed with the loaves and fishes; that journeyed through the parted seas; that were filled inside and out on the day of Pentecost, the Jewish festival honoring the giving of the law].

Susan Taylor King served as a laundress, nurse, secretary and teacher for the Army and was also among the 5,000 present that night. Her grandmother had her educated secretly in Savannah; she quickly learned to read and write. An excellent student, she volunteered with the Army at the age of 14. At camp she quickly began to act as secretary to the camp's officers and correspondent for the men writing letters to families and girl friends. She taught the jubilee (freed men and women) and soldiers how to read and write. She served as a nurse with Harriet Tubman, Clara Barton, and Charlotte Purvis for the scores of wounded. In her 1902 memoir she recalls the grand night: "It was a glorious day for us all, and we enjoyed every minute of it, and as a fitting close and the crowning event of this occasion we had a grand barbecue."

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Susan King Taylor

But months later, camped on Morris Island, the site of the battle portrayed in the movie, "Glory," with Denzel Washington, about the black troops of the Massachusetts 54<sup>th</sup> Regiment and the South Carolina 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, USCT, storming the island's Fort Wagner, Susan King Taylor offers this elegy:

Outside of the fort were many skulls lying about; I have often moved them one side out of the path. The comrades and I would have quite a debate as to which side the men fought on. Some thought they were the skulls of our boys; others thought they were the enemy's; but as there was no definite way to know, it was never decided which could lay claim to

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them. They were a gruesome sight, those fleshless heads and grinning jaws, but by this time I had become accustomed to worse things and did not feel as I might have earlier in my camp life.

It seems strange how our aversion to seeing suffering is overcome in war,— how we are able to see the most sickening sights, such as men with their limbs blown off and mangled by the deadly shells, without a shudder; and instead of turning away, how we hurry to assist in alleviating their pain, bind up their wounds, and press the cool water to their parched lips, with feelings only of sympathy and pity.

Francis Grimké was somewhere in Charleston, a city under wartime siege the night of the emancipation. The SC troops his wife taught and tended brought freedom to his city the next year. Years later, this mission of high faith, the realization of freedom and suffering at the heart of the elder's prayer, the order of faith in Miss Kitty's favorite verse, the silent examples of the lived lives of women and their children, the courage of teachers transforming the lives of their students, his wife's calling; her presence in freedom during its first moments while he was still enslaved is proclaimed in a sermon in 1902:

"God is not dead--nor is he an indifferent onlooker at what is going on in this world. One day he will make restitution for blood; He will call the oppressors to account. Justice may

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sleep, but it never dies. The individual, race, or nation which does wrong, which sets at defiance God's great law, especially God's great law of love, of brotherhood, will be sure, sooner or late, to pay the penalty. We reap as we sow. With that measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again.”

Harriet Tubman was at Hilton Head that night, too. Years earlier when she first escaped slavery, she, too, described the signs of freedom's answered prayers: *“There was such a glory over everything, the sun comes like gold through the trees.”* She reminds us to see in the world around us God's abiding spirit, his strength for the journey. The elder's prayer for better is itself a sign of grace for a new world built by abundant, overflowing measures of love.

She is the deepest reflection of American freedom; unbroken and unbent by limits; steadfast in dignity; creating without labels to express the profound responsibility of birth, life, family; living. Like a mother smoothing a child's hair, she took the ugly ruffles of America, spoke in quiet promise to its bullies, and offered an endless measure of her gifts as visions of freedom beyond labels to grant the gathered peace that shines within.

St. Augustine observed: “Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe.” So the elder included sacrifice and misery as she expanded the context of her



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prayer to see behind the veil. The elder recalled the voices lost in the silence of time and the Middle Passage. The silence is never finished. Zora Neale said, “No hour is ever eternity, but it has its right to weep.” In the weeping time, each of us must find a way to share the deeper meaning of death beyond our grief and fear.

So the elder remembered those sinking and tossed in the tempests who took flight in the sea. Those dehydrated by the passage's crowned conditions, infected by sanitation, robbed of breath and sight, then with jaw clenched silent, tossed and drowned in the sea, their shark-picked bones settling; gliding into the deep, into the darkness of the trailing waters like stones.

They are not forgotten in her prayer. Those here and gone she raises above the storm. Their lives, their silent message and prayers, are a metaphor she enlarges and brings into life itself. That she can and knows how, is a part of the glory of everything.

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Here is the whole of the line Lorenzo Turner records:

"For those who take your hand for drowning comfort," she says. "Give them better."



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### Notes

The Hymn sung by Charlotte Forten's student choir for the emancipation celebration:

Oh none in all the world before  
Were ever glad as we.  
We're free on Carolina's shore,  
We're all at home and free.

thou friend and helper of the poor,  
Who suffered for our sake.  
To open every prison door,  
And every yoke to break.

Look down, oh, Saviour sweet, and smile,  
And help us sing and pray;  
The hands that blessed the little child,  
upon our foreheads lay.



## Author's Note

Thank you for reading! I am a writer and book maker who researches traditions and community history and shares the experiences and insights in digital formats and print.



The ideas and experiences here are mainly from the 19<sup>th</sup> century families. They recall both oral, print, and community histories. The work also relies upon the spirituals as a main source of insight about African-American life within the context of American slavery and freedom. The spirituals record the most important reality in slavery--the response of the enslaved themselves. The central reality in slavery is not the conditions, but the enslaved, whose skills and responses, whose attitudes and beliefs and values (both group and individual)

shape, influence, and often triumph the slavery experience, despite its cruel and inhumane conditions; yet, except as escape narratives, the daily secrets of how to affirm humanity while confronting enslavement remain untold.

I reflect the eras before and after freedom in the story telling and book design. Nineteenth century book making coincided with the US having the largest literate population in the world and included the mass reproduction of images. The text, headings, and imaged I selected and created reflect these milestones. I have also included the work of Sarah Whitman Wyman, the Boston pioneer artist-designer for books whose work echoed the Arts and Crafts Movement which viewed art and life as inseparable. Wyman wrote, "all forms of labor are beautiful and sacred because...it all has the stamp of



nobility, being essential to the world's need." She was the first artist–designer to give mass–produced book covers a sense of simple elegance through line, color, and lettering." I adapted her work and a range of ideas for digital print and screen display. The colors, also custom designed, reflect the earlier century.

The record of African–American history is incomplete, esp. within families. Some documentation is deliberately inserted or omitted, to duplicate the way families discovered and assembled missing pieces of their stories and their era's history. For the readers, you can easily recover or check sources by putting key words or phrases into search engines for more detail. Other clues lie within the book itself.

I write in the voices that speak to me. That includes the voices of the people I am writing about. The voices of any article or book lets you know when you are a trusted friend; the words come through you as a vessel; it is the writer's highest experience, and each one of us who writes experiences it differently, but we know it by the way readers respond. I hope these words speak to you!

Lastly, faith was woven into community conversations during the century, but its omni–presence is largely missing from articles and books about the last two hundred years. I try to remedy its absence by commenting throughout the text in the same way community members have commented to me over the years. It's a tradition worthy of understanding and living worth keeping alive.

All of the ideas here have been cross–checked against the spirituals. That includes these two verses for Book One:

*Don't know what my mother wants to stay here fuh,  
Dis ole world ain't been no friend to huh.  
Oh, stand the storm, it won't be long, we'll anchor by and by."*

I hope you recognize something of yourself in this work. It really belongs to all of us. The irony is that the light of glory could only be seen behind the veil, but its signs mark the passage of the

living. Howard Thurman—and Harriet Tubman taught me it is everywhere. As the griot, it's my office to gather and preserve tradition, mark its presence and pass it along; to dust off its footprints and remind us to watch our steps. I tell the stories; the meaning is yours alone, but belongs with all of us.

*Careful little children  
Mind how you walk on the cross.  
Your foot might slip  
And your soul be lost.*

And finally, for my mother and father and all those gone. They knew about living and dying behind the invisible veil:

*I done cross the separating line,  
Done lebe this ol' world behind*







Dr. King's Dream. Hill House, Mississippi  
July 4, 1936  
(Photograph by Dorothea Lange)

*Walter Rhett*





[your page]

## Image Notes

Many images by American artists and photographers are available in the public domain from libraries and museums.

The Hilton Head 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnic and the image below are by Marion Wolcott Post; the farm portraits by Dorothea Lange, the creator of documentary photography, from the Library of Congress FSA collection. The collage of the “separating line” includes the illustration “Autum” by Homer Winslow, from the Boston Museum. The flowers are from designs works by the pioneer book designer–artist Sarah Witman Wyman, from the Boston Museum. Illustrations are from Harper's Weekly, Leslie's Weekly, and French book editions from the Bibliotheque Nationale of France. All images and collections online.



Comments about Walter Rhett's writings from New York Times readers:

*(MI) . . . your beautiful last words fills a bit of a gap. Again Walter, THANK YOU!*

*(CA) Very beautifully written, Walter! Thank you.*

*(VA) So, too, the lines of your poetic prose carry on the soaring tradition of the best possibilities in each of us- your ongoing dreamsposts enliven . . while we grasp and weep . . at the breath of the inner vision . . .*

*(CA) You always write with grace.*



# *“A Glory Over Everything”*

The Invisible Veil



Walter Rhett